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## A Message from the Surgeon General: Step Up to Stop Sexual Assault

Filed under [FLEET AND THE FLEET MARINE FORCE](#), [FORCE HEALTH AND SAFETY](#), [LEADERSHIP](#) (NO COMMENTS)

**By Vice Adm. Matthew L. Nathan, U.S. Navy surgeon general and chief, U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery**



When we join the military, we take an oath to uphold the core values of honor, courage and commitment. Sexual assault — which has no place in the military and is a crime — erodes these core values and the trust of our fellow shipmates.

Echoing the sentiment of the chief of naval operations, it is absolutely inconceivable to me that our shipmates would assault one another — those they entrust their lives to at sea, on the battlefield, or at one of our medical treatment facilities around the globe. It is up to you — our leadership and fellow shipmates — to take a stand and not only hold

offenders accountable but take a step further and eliminate sexual assault from our service.

April marks Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Month. This year's theme is, "Live Our Values: Step Up to Stop Sexual Assault." During this month, Navy Medicine will focus its efforts on awareness and prevention of sexual assault and harassment through command-level education and special events. While sexual assault prevention is a priority year-round, we must continue to increase our awareness and look out for what we call "Ship, Shipmate and Self."

Regardless of any role, commanding officer, health care provider, administrative support staff, and a myriad of others – you are part of the Navy Medicine family. Therefore, I look to you to create and cultivate a climate of trust and professionalism in each of your commands. A climate that is intolerant of sexual assault, sexual harassment and sexism. I look to you to continue to uphold our core values and high standards of professionalism in all that we do. Be an example to your command and to your fellow shipmates and foster a command climate of dignity and respect.

Sexual assault is both a safety and readiness issue for Navy Medicine, and it must be addressed at all levels of our chain of command. Sexual assault divides departments, teams, and degrades operational effectiveness. We cannot take care of our "ship," our mission, if we do not have trust. We need to be vigilant in taking care of one another. If you see a shipmate who is either harassing someone or being harassed, speak up. It is all of our responsibility.

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We must take care of one another. Also, please do not be afraid or ashamed to come forth if you believe you have been sexually assaulted or harassed. We need to not only be accountable for our fellow shipmates, but we must also take care of ourselves. Offenders will be held accountable.

Over the past two years we have increased sexual assault and sexual harassment awareness across the Navy Medicine enterprise, making it part of our everyday drumbeat. We now need to continue to be vigilant in our education and training; ensure 24/7 response capabilities for victim support; maintain availability of reporting procedures worldwide; and maintain accountability that enhances the safety and well-being of all.

Thank you for the work you do every day. Together we must ensure that incidents of sexual assault and harassment are eradicated from our Service. It is my honor to be your surgeon general. See you around the fleet.

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